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Bridging the Gaps for Students in Long Beach: Cross-System Efforts to Institutionalize Dual Enrollment

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Thad Nodine
Laura Jaeger
Kathy Reeves Bracco



SACRAMENTO STATE

California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street, Tahoe Hall 3065
Sacramento, California 95819-6081
www.csus.edu/edinsights
[@EdInsightsCtr](https://twitter.com/EdInsightsCtr)

A Series of Briefs from Bridging the Gap (BtG)

This brief is part of a series that also includes [Bridging the Gaps for Students in the Salinas Valley: Cross-System Efforts to Increase College Readiness](#) and [Bridging the Gaps through Cross-System Education Partnerships: Principles of Practice from Long Beach and the Salinas Valley](#). The collaborations in Long Beach and the Salinas Valley were implemented through Bridging the Gap (BtG), an initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation.

In 2016, a team of education leaders from the Long Beach College Promise (the Promise) joined Bridging the Gap (BtG), an initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation to build and strengthen student transitions from high school to college. The institutions partnering in the Promise and the BtG initiative were the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College (LBCC), the California State University Long Beach (CSULB), and the City of Long Beach. In joining BtG, the partners sought to assess and improve the partnership's dual enrollment programs spanning the three public institutions, pilot and implement new career exploration tools and programs, and develop a plan for a data warehouse to collect and share student information across the institutions.

In this brief, we draw from interviews with faculty, staff, administrators, and others who were engaged in the Long Beach BtG team's efforts to answer the following question for those interested in strengthening or developing a cross-system education partnership in their communities:

How has a long-standing regional education partnership worked across systems to institutionalize efforts to increase college readiness for broad populations of students?

In answering this question, we focused on one aspect of the team's efforts to improve college readiness: its work to assess and improve its dual enrollment programs. The Long Beach team benefited from having a common vision for and a cohesive cross-system approach to dual enrollment, a range of existing relationships and communications structures, and extensive experience with the practical challenges of working across education systems. Drawing from these strengths, the team worked to institutionalize dual enrollment by identifying gaps in academic and support services for dually-enrolled students, by developing a professional development plan for LBCC and CSULB faculty teaching dual enrollment courses, and by creating a data warehouse to track students across institutions.

History and Context

For a quarter century, a regional education partnership in Long Beach, California, has taken on a vital task: to develop a seamless education experience for students from kindergarten through graduate school in a state where public K-12 school districts, community colleges, and universities operate in separate policy spheres. The partnership began garnering national attention in 1994, when the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City

College (LBCC), the California State University Long Beach (CSULB), and the City of Long Beach came together to support the economic and educational needs of local residents in the face of widespread job losses in established industries, major changes in workforce needs, and demographic shifts, including an influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia.

Early activities of the Long Beach Seamless Education Partnership, as it was known then, focused on aligning standards, curricula, and assessments. The partners doubled down in 2008 by creating the Long Beach College Promise to increase affordable college opportunities, including a tuition-free semester at LBCC and guaranteed college admission at CSULB for local high school students who complete minimum college prep requirements. The partnership continued to expand over the next decade, with initiatives to provide early outreach to students and families, support for more career and technical pathways, alignment of advisement structures across the institutions, and an upgraded “Promise 2.0” in 2018 that includes two years of free tuition at LBCC, a cohort advising model across LBCC and CSULB for transfer students, and other cross-institutional benefits.

In joining BtG, education leaders in Long Beach leveraged their long-standing partnership to advance and deepen their work in dual enrollment, career exploration, and the development of a data warehouse. CSULB led the Long Beach BtG team. The Long Beach College Promise steering committee provided oversight, with BtG activities coordinated with and planned by mid-level leaders (teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators), whose expertise aligned with project needs. Long Beach is a relatively compact city with a population of about 470,000 people. The school district office, LBCC’s main campus, and CSULB are located within 10 miles of each other.

Student demographics.

About 77,400 students were enrolled at LBUSD in fall 2015, with 25,500 and 37,400 attending LBCC and CSULB, respectively (headcount enrollment). Over two-thirds of the K-12 students and about half of the postsecondary students were from low-income families. Latinx represented about 55% of those in the school district, 48% at the community college, and 37% at the university; both LBCC and CSULB are designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions. African

Long Beach BtG Partners

California State University, Long Beach (CSULB)
Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD)
Long Beach City College (LBCC)
City of Long Beach

Support Providers

Facilitation and Support: Career Ladders Project
Documentation and Research: Education Insights Center (EdInsights)
Evaluation: Engage R+D, Equal Measure, and Harder+Company Community Research

Bridging the Gap is an initiative of The James Irvine Foundation.

Americans represented about 14% of K-12 enrollments, 15% at LBCC, and 4% at CSULB. LBCC estimates that about 30% of its students are the first in their families to attend college.¹

Methodology

Our findings are based on studies by EdInsights that included: (1) interviews and surveys with 12 faculty (7 from LBCC and 5 from CSULB) about teaching dual enrollment courses, including their experiences with and needs for professional development; and (2) interviews with 13 faculty, counselors, administrators, and program directors integrally involved in dual enrollment at their institution (4 from LBUSD, 3 from LBCC, and 6 from CSULB). Our findings are limited by these sample sizes and are therefore exploratory. Some student data are drawn from internal reports by the education partners. Methodology and other citations are drawn from *Offering dual enrollment in a cross-system partnership: A case study in Long Beach.*²

Long Beach BtG's Dual Enrollment Offerings

LBUSD, LBCC, and CSULB have developed a coherent cross-system approach to offering dual enrollment courses. The school district prioritizes dual enrollment as a key element of its college and career readiness strategy. The district hosts joint LBCC-CSULB information sessions for students and parents at the high schools, provides additional information via school counselors, facilitates scheduling of the courses, and allocates funding support for the courses provided by CSULB. Courses provided by the LBCC are funded based on enrollment. The community college and university offer different sets of courses to the high school students, and they coordinate joint outreach sessions to students and parents at the high schools. More specifically, here is how dual enrollment is structured at LBCC and CSULB:

- **LBCC.** The school district has six industry-related pathways and is working with LBCC to increase dual enrollment opportunities within those pathways. Each of the pathways provides a cohort model, a sequence of related high school and college courses, and support services for students. Some courses are taught at LBCC, others at the high schools. LBCC provides a dedicated mentoring coordinator for the high school students.³
- **CSULB.** Since 2015, the university has offered two dual enrollment courses for students from LBUSD: (1) U.S. Diversity and the Ethnic Experience is taught by CSULB Ethnic Studies faculty at the comprehensive high schools and aims to reach underrepresented students who may not consider themselves college-bound. (2) Mathematical Ideas 103 is for high school students who are not pursuing STEM majors to fulfill their college math requirement before finishing high school. This math course was initially offered only during the summer at CSULB, but is now offered during the academic year at LBUSD's high school campuses.⁴

A Common Vision and a Willingness to Address Challenges

In interviews, the faculty, staff, and administrators we spoke with from all three institutions share a common vision about dual enrollment and strategies that contribute to its success. They also are aware of the practical challenges involved in institutionalizing a program that serves

students across education systems at their school sites and campuses. The Long Beach BtG partners built on the existing relationships and communications structures of their regional cross-system partnership as they worked to examine and address some of these challenges, including professional development for faculty who teach dual enrollment courses, academic support services for dual enrollment students, and the creation of a cross-system data warehouse.

A shared vision about the benefits and risks for students and the need for appropriate pedagogy and student supports.

Across the board, interviewees from all three systems emphasized the value of dual enrollment in the following ways: in introducing first-generation college students to postsecondary course content and to the campuses themselves, in providing them with college credits at no financial cost, and in supporting them at the start of their postsecondary journey. The breadth of dual enrollment options at LBCC and CSULB—from pathway programs to ethnic studies classes—was described as crucial in addressing the needs of a wide range of high school students.

[Dual enrollment] students are coming to recognize that, if they start college now, they have a higher probability of completing college later on, and that's what the statistics are saying."

—LBCC interviewee

Interviewees expressed concerns, however, about the risks that high school students face in taking dual enrollment courses. For example, if they drop a college class or receive a failing grade on their college transcript, could this confirm a belief they might have that college is not for them? In light of this, educators in the partnership decided that outreach to students and parents is crucial, so that they are aware of the commitments involved in taking a college course (see Coordinated Processes for Outreach to Students, Parents, and Counselors on page 7). The educators also emphasized the need for instructional approaches and student supports geared for a diverse range of first-year college students.

Professional development for faculty. One of the priorities for the Long Beach BtG partners was to examine and address the need for professional development for faculty who teach dual enrollment courses. In our interviews with high school and college administrators, faculty, and staff, many respondents said that dual enrollment can help postsecondary faculty gain a better understanding of the needs of high school students, which in turn can lead to pedagogical changes that benefit all first-year students. In our interviews and focus groups, specifically with postsecondary faculty, most said they were not aware of and had not benefited from professional development directly related to teaching dual enrollment courses.⁵ When asked what kinds of professional development they would like to see, the most prominent answers were:

- a better understanding of high school students, developmentally, and information about the kinds of scaffolding they had received in school, so faculty can better plan their instruction; and
- more opportunities to engage with high school instructors and other faculty teaching dual enrollment to share best practices, explore new pedagogy, and plan upcoming courses.

Almost half of faculty interviewees described challenges in serving a high school student population with a range of needs and academic readiness. Faculty often did not have formative information about the students' knowledge and skills. For example, some faculty did not know about students' learning disabilities until late in the term and, as a result, they developed strategies the following term to encourage students to inform them about these issues.⁶

"College faculty need to understand that, even though the course is a college-level class, their students are still in high school. This requires a shift in thinking and a clearer sense of responsibility for their students."

—CSULB faculty

Supports for a wide range of interests and needs. Long Beach provides a range of dual enrollment courses to address students' diverse interests, and most interviewees described this approach as a key strength. Several respondents also raised questions about who dual enrollment can best serve and how best to provide supports for high school students. The questions about supports included logistical issues involving the kinds, locations, and scheduling of academic or other supports. They also focused on the need to inform faculty about available supports. Nearly all faculty respondents said that connecting dual enrollment courses to pathway programs is beneficial, particularly for first-generation college students, because these programs connect individual courses to an overall academic plan. Faculty also said they would like institutions to:

- address transportation challenges for students;
- facilitate better access to on-campus support services; and
- provide access to the colleges' online student portals.

Faculty also acknowledged a need to hold office hours at times and locations that work for high school students. In discussing professional development options, faculty said they would like information from both high schools and colleges about student recruitment policies, expectations for students, student supports, and course sequencing. Some faculty said they also would like to provide input on these policies.

"Faculty are not only the content experts, but they are the ones who directly interact with dual enrollment students. Planning must include faculty, to a large degree."

—Faculty member

Dual enrollment leaders in multiple roles and levels at each institution.

Interviewees said that champions of dual enrollment had come forward at each institution and ranged from top administrators to faculty and staff working directly with students. They also said that delegating authority for dual enrollment to key individuals throughout each organization is important for institutionalizing the work, including sustaining the program in case these champions leave their current positions. The superintendent of LBUSD annually commits significant resources to dual enrollment, including funding the CSULB courses. District staff, school principals, and counselors participate in planning and coordination. Faculty and staff from LBCC and CSULB work with school counselors and teachers to ensure that outreach is coordinated and that students in dual enrollment courses are receiving adequate supports.

“If you want long-term conversations, then these have to be among more than just one or two institutions; they need to be cross-institutional...Then the question is, ‘Have the conversations been good enough, deep enough, strong enough to sustain past the grant period?”

—LBUSD interviewee

Coordinated processes for outreach to students, parents, and counselors.

Interviewees emphasized the importance of establishing ongoing processes across institutions to facilitate consistent messaging to students, especially about their dual enrollment options and the commitments required for college classes. Years ago, representatives from LBCC and CSULB established regular meetings with the school district to coordinate consistent messaging to students about the many dual enrollment options in Long Beach. Staff from the high schools are now represented prominently at these meetings, as well. This change led to better understanding about dual enrollment among high school counselors, who provide information directly to students about the amount of homework expected in college courses, the benefits of participation, credit transfer, and logistical issues. In addition, high school counselors and the postsecondary institutions coordinate marketing and recruitment strategies, including information nights at the high schools for students and parents, where both LBCC and CSULB representatives explain students' dual enrollment options.

“We have to be thinking about consistency in messaging to the students, because they are getting information from the K-12 district. They are also getting information from the colleges. [We need to] make sure there's continuity..., so that students are receiving the right information at the right time, and it's consistent.”

—LBCC interviewee

Addressing differences across systems.

In discussing their messaging and outreach, the Long Beach partners said they work to make sure that their approach to dual enrollment is coherent to both students and parents. This has led to collaborative efforts to explain how the partners' approaches differ, including in the courses offered, the language used by each institution (for example, credits versus units and counseling versus advising), scheduling, and locations. Yet, even with Long Beach's history of collaboration on dual enrollment, much work remains. Our interviews and surveys with faculty highlighted several cross-system and institutional policies they would like to see addressed:

- better alignment of schedules;
- policies to ensure that credits will transfer;
- compatibility of technology across institutions;
- criteria for student placement into dual enrollment courses;
- criteria for dropping out of dual enrollment courses; and
- scaffolding and sequencing of dual enrollment courses.

Working with different incentive structures, with implications for sustainability.

There are also different incentives for dual enrollment for each of the three education systems. For the school district, a key incentive for expanding dual enrollment is that it is now included as an indicator of college and career readiness on the California School Dashboard. LBCC has a financial incentive to increase the number of its full-time equivalent (FTE) students, especially in smaller academic departments. At CSULB, the incentives are not as direct, but the value proposition includes supporting student preparation for the university, providing more equitable opportunities for students, and speeding time to degree for those who enroll with credits already earned (the last incentive is a focus of the CSU system's Graduation Initiative 2025). There are also counter-incentives built into requirements for instructor qualifications, faculty time and workloads, transportation and course scheduling, administrative systems, and student support structures.

The incentive structures also highlight the precariousness of institutional efforts to improve student transitions across systems. For example, interviewees raised the following kinds of issues regarding the sustainability of the range of dual enrollment offerings in Long Beach:

- Can LBUSD sustain its broad approach to dual enrollment if enrollment in high school electives decreases as more students take dual enrollment courses?
- Can LBCC sustain its commitment to dual enrollment courses if total enrollment levels increase significantly?
- Can CSULB sustain its dual enrollment offerings if the school district can no longer fund them? Also, since CSU faculty who teach dual enrollment courses do not receive credit toward their teaching loads for these courses, how long is this sustainable?⁷

“Our board is funding both of those [dual enrollment courses]. I’m very honest with Cal State professors and our people to say, ‘It’s not sustainable.’ It really isn’t. It cost us more than \$10,000 a class to offer a course. Right now, we happen to be able to do that, but I don’t want anyone building a program around this, because in five or 10 years, who’s to say that we can still provide that funding?”

—LBUSD interviewee

In the face of these challenges in engaging in cross-system work, interviewees said that the shared sense of trust and the commitments to students developed through the Long Beach College Promise provided the BtG team with an existing network of proactive cross-system relationships. They said that, for these networks to be sustained, each new initiative needs to feed into existing priorities—both for the partnership and for each of the institutions.

“There has to be this constant calibration around not always having to start over with every new...initiative that comes out that’s helping us support these efforts.”

—LBCC interviewee

Interviewees said that the BtG team had addressed challenges in existing programs (e.g., dual enrollment and a data warehouse) and had taken the time to learn more about each institution’s motivations and context. This helped the team members address student needs across systems, rather than focusing on their own institutional needs or limitations.

“I think dual enrollment works well, because there are efforts happening to work across systems and to develop protocols around the entire system, not just, ‘Well, this is how we do it, and you guys need to do it our way.’ It’s, ‘We need to help this student who’s in your system, but has taken something in our system. So, how do we do that?’”

—CSULB interviewee

A cross-system data warehouse to support decisionmaking.

One goal of the Long Beach BtG partners was to develop a plan to implement a data warehouse to better share information about student progress across the education systems. The goal was to make student data available from each institution, so that the institutions could not only track student progress across systems, but also identify risk and success factors that impact student opportunities and outcomes. With regard to the connection between the warehouse and dual enrollment, several interviewees emphasized the importance of: (1) having routine ways to track high school students enrolled in dual enrollment courses, and (2) being able to learn more about the relationship between enrolling in dual enrollment courses and other factors of college success, including degree completion.

To lay the groundwork for the data warehouse, each partner agreed to an amendment to the Long Beach College Promise's memorandum of understanding regarding their commitment to share student-level data. In addition, the partners had to resolve technical challenges about how to merge data files from three different systems that use different coding and student identifiers. Currently, the system is in the process of merging the data files.

"What we've mentioned all along, and why the data warehouse is part of our Bridging the Gap effort, is [that] we have no institutional way of collecting this data for dual enrollment other than [through] our partnerships."

—LBUSD interviewee

Conclusion

This Long Beach BtG story highlights key factors that appear to be central to designing and implementing dual enrollment programs across multiple institutions, based on the perspectives of faculty, staff, and administrators who developed and managed such programs in Long Beach. For example, our interviews suggest that supporting student learning and success through dual enrollment likely requires a first order of program development, including selecting faculty, establishing course options, and implementing student supports. Once the program is in place, a second order of work is likely needed to improve and sustain it. Key opportunities and challenges in this second order of work could include identifying and understanding institutional incentives, building on existing communication opportunities, developing professional development for faculty, engaging more targeted student supports, and sharing and using data to assess student needs and outcomes.

More broadly, this second order of program development also highlights the extent to which education partners can leverage cross-system partnerships to institutionalize the work within each of the education institutions. Consistent with this, we found that dual enrollment efforts in Long Beach are becoming a more integral part of each institution and of the cross-system partnership. As more faculty, staff, and administrators participate in professional development opportunities associated with dual enrollment, implement better supports for dually-enrolled students, and use data to understand the program's impacts, they are creating structures that serve to institutionalize and sustain the work.

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About the Authors

Dr. Thad Nodine, senior fellow at EdInsights, is a novelist and writer specializing in education policy, practice, and research. For over 20 years, he has published stories about innovations in K-12 and postsecondary education that help low-income and first-generation college students achieve their educational goals.

Laura Jaeger is the K-16 research and policy director at EdInsights. In this role, she oversees high school-to-college transition work focused on researching ways to support student progress through the education pipeline, supporting cross-system educational partnerships, and examining policy implications of current college and career readiness efforts.

Dr. Kathy Reeves Bracco, senior fellow at EdInsights, has over 25 years of experience as a higher education researcher, with a primary focus on policies and programs that address the linkage between secondary and postsecondary education systems.

About the Education Insights Center (EdInsights)

EdInsights is a research and policy center devoted to student success and the public benefits of education. Our mission is to inform and improve policymaking and practice for K-12 education, community colleges, and public universities. We accomplish this through applied research, evaluation, the California Education Policy Fellowship Program, and the CSU Student Success Network.

Endnotes

¹ For first-generation college students at LBCC, see <https://www.lbcc.edu/post/first-generation-students-faculty-resources>. For other citations, see methodology.

² Jaeger, L., Bracco, K.R., & Nodine, T. (2018, November). *Offering dual enrollment in a cross-system partnership: A case study in Long Beach*. Internal report prepared for The James Irvine Foundation, San Francisco, CA.

³ High school students can also take individual college courses for which they meet prerequisites.

⁴ In addition, a small and select number of high school juniors and seniors can enroll in the Young Scholars Program at CSULB and earn up to four units of college credit each semester.

⁵ This aligned with our literature search. We found some studies about learning standards, student outcomes, and instructor qualifications in dual enrollment. There are articles on training for K-12 instructors who teach dual enrollment. But we found very little on professional development for community college or university faculty who teach these courses.

⁶ Postsecondary faculty do not have access to high school students' Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).

⁷ CSULB faculty also said that currently there are no systemwide guidelines for dual enrollment, a situation that can cause challenges to setting up administrative systems (including registration) to serve high school students.